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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001262

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: ETHNIC SHAN LEADERS: OUT FOR THE COUNT?

REF: A. RANGOON 185

[B](#). RANGOON 332

Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#). (SBU) SUMMARY: A GOB court has sentenced eight leading ethnic Shan politicians and cease-fire group leaders, arrested in February 2005, to stiff prison sentences ranging from 12 to over 100 years. The harshest sentence of all was reserved for Hkun Htun Oo, one of Burma's most effective pro-democracy ethnic leaders. The sentences represent yet another setback to the democracy movement and a blow to Shan ethnic leaders and their nascent efforts to develop common objectives among ethnic political parties and cease-fire groups. The sentences also show the lengths the regime will go to get the constitution of their dreams. End Summary.

[2](#). (C) According to Embassy sources, a GOB court on November 2 sentenced eight ethnic Shan politicians and other cease-fire group leaders, including Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) Chairman Hkun Htun Oo. The ethnic leaders had been arrested in early February (ref A) and subsequently tried at secret tribunals inside Rangoon's Insein Prison (ref B). According to the wife of Hkun Htun Oo and his lawyer, U Aung Khaing, the sentencing session lasted for eight hours and the presiding judge became so weary of reading the numerous charges that a volunteer judge had to relieve him.

[3](#). (SBU) Sentences were handed down for eight Shan leaders. Sentences of some of the key persons include:

-- Hkun Htun Oo, SNLD Chairman: nine charges (6 political, 3 economic); 53 years imprisonment, plus two life sentences.

-- Gen. Hso Ten, Chairman Shan State Army-North: eight charges (6 political, 2 economic); 46 years imprisonment, plus three life sentences.

-- Sai Nyunt Lwin, SNLD Secretary: six political charges; 25 years imprisonment, plus three life sentences.

-- Sai Hla Aung, SNLD CEC member: six political charges, 39 years imprisonment, plus two life sentences.

-- Sao Tha Oo, SNLD CEC member: two political charges, 12 years imprisonment (Note: Sao Tha Oo reportedly agreed to be a prosecution witness in return for leniency. End Note.)

-- Three other members of the Shan State New Generation Group were charged on six political charges and each received 35 years imprisonment, plus two life sentences.

[4](#). (U) Hkun Htun Oo's SNLD party won 23 seats in the 1990 legislative election. His party represented the largest bloc of ethnic MPs-elect and was second only to the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the overall election. Until the time of his arrest in February, Hkun Htun Oo chaired the United Nationalities Alliance, Burma's leading coalition of ethnic political parties.

[5](#). (C) COMMENT: With Hkun Htun Oo and other key ethnic politicians out of the picture for the foreseeable future, the GOB has effectively emasculated the ethnic pro-democracy movement, which the Shan have heretofore dominated. The National Convention, charged with "drafting" a new constitution, is scheduled to reconvene in December 2005. It seems clear that the GOB wants only the voices of its handful of handpicked ethnic delegates to be heard. The sentences, harsh even by regime standards, send a loud message to all pro-democracy groups of the consequences of independent thinking. The sentences are also a blow to Shan ethnic leaders who had undertaken efforts early in the year to develop common objectives among ethnic political parties and cease-fire groups. The regime, which claims the pursuit of "national unity" as its primary raison d'tre, clearly took affront to their effort. They sent a clear message to other ethnic group leaders that they rubberstamp the regime's plans or go to prison. End Comment.

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